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Information for Social Change

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The cover and back page were designed by Fernando Pacheco Bellas, incorporating "Tree of Knowledge" by Mr Fish.

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Editorial

The theme of this issue is social class and its relevance for library workers. The Library and Information Commission funded research project into Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion commissioned a series of working papers on aspects of social exclusion. One of these papers - available from Rebecca Linley at Leeds Metropolitan University - covers the issue of social class. Our first article gives a synopsis of the working paper and an introduction to the topic.

To provide a historical perspective on Social Class and libraries, we include an article on Libraries in the Soviet Union. This indicates the class based nature of Soviet libraries, developed along the lines of Marxist thinking. These libraries were developed by Lenin, grew under Stalin and survived the Cold War, but have suffered badly since the collapse of Communism.

Communism is still alive and well in Cuba, which has a highly developed library infrastructure. Literacy and education are two fruits of the Cuban Revolution, which has faced an illegal 40 year blockade from the US. In recent years the US government has tried to weaken the Revolution from within by funding various "dissident" organisations such as the self-styled "Friends of Cuban Libraries". The activities and backers of this group are revealed in this issue and ISC supporters are urged to become true friends of Cuba by joining the Cuban Libraries Support Group.

A new regular feature will be book and journal reviews by John Vincent. If you would like to suggest a title for him to review, send your information via the ISC address. Also, if you would like to make any contributions to, or comments on, ISC send them to the same address. We are pleased to receive letters, articles and reviews.

The next issue of ISC will be published in June 2000 on the theme of Race and Libraries - get your ideas to us by 1st June.

Venceremos !

John Pateman

Public libraries, social exclusion and social class

People in general, and librarians in particular, seem quite uncomfortable when the issue of social class is raised. In order to deal with this discomfort a typical response to the subject is that "class no longer exists". This view is espoused at the very highest levels of public life. Margaret Thatcher informed us that "there is no such thing as society ; just individuals and their families". John Major told us that "we are all classless now". And Tony Blair, soon after becoming Prime Minister, declared that one of the aims of his government was to "make everybody middle class". At this year's Labour Party conference, Tony Blair announced that "the class war is over". Putting these political sound bites to one side, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the class system is alive and well. Indeed, the class system thrived under Thatcher and Major, and nothing significant has changed since New Labour came to power.

This is not to say, however, that the Tories and New Labour are identical in their approach to social class. Although class has been removed from the New Labour lexicon, measures such as the national minimum wage, working people's tax credits, New Deal, the MacPherson report and the Social Exclusion Unit, do indicate that this government is serious about tackling poverty, discrimination and social exclusion. This has made it possible and acceptable to discuss and take action on issues such as racism but the class issue continues to be overlooked. This may, wholly or in part, be a result of New Labour's electoral obsession with the middle classes of middle England, rather than its more traditional working class support base.

The debate about social exclusion is to be welcomed, but the exclusion of class from this debate needs to be challenged. Hill (1996) found that 81% of people believe there is a class struggle in this country compared with 66% fifteen years ago. And Travis (1998) revealed that 68% of people think that Britain is class ridden, while only 21% consider it classless. But what exactly is meant by class, and what has it got to do with social exclusion and public libraries ?

Class and social exclusion

People's discomfort about class is connected to their difficulty in defining, understanding and applying the concept to themselves and other people. As Adonis and Pollard (1997) have said, "ever since Marx, the word class has been heavily loaded. Occupation and family are generally taken as the starting point. From families and jobs flow the patterns of income, values, advantage and social behaviour which go to make up classes". Let us look at each of these in turn.

The concept of social class was developed by Karl Marx (1848), who suggested that there were three class categories :

1. the capitalist class comprises the owners and controllers of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The aristocracy, landowners and members of the military / industrial complex would fall into this category, which represents a very small proportion of the total population.

2. the middle class act to a considerable extent as agents of the capitalist class, but the degree to which they exercise control over the means of production is often limited, and their income is derived mainly from selling their labour power for a salary. The middle class includes managers, small businesses, professionals and middle ranks of the state apparatus. Many professional librarians and library workers fall into this category which makes up 39% of the population.

3. the working class includes the great majority of the population, who sell their labour power, their capacity to work, in return for a wage or salary, and who work under the direction of the owners of the means of production and their agents. This category includes skilled, semi skilled and unskilled workers as well as those defined as "residual and those at the lowest levels of subsistence". This category makes up 61% of the population.

According to Marx there is a contradiction between the interests of these classes and attempts to resolve these contradictions lead to class struggle. The Marxist analysis is based on ownership and power. More modern definitions of class have tended to be based on occupation. This is the basis of the six class A, B, C1, C2, D, E hierarchy used by market researchers. In general terms groups A,B, C1 are middle class and groups C2,D,E are working class. Under this scheme librarians were classified as "technical" or "associate professional" which put them in group B (middle class).

New Labour has replaced these categories with a new scheme which is also based on occupation but none of the 7 new categories mentions the word class. Librarians have been upgraded in the new scheme to group 1 (higher managerial and professional occupation), a position which we share with doctors, lawyers, dentists, higher civil servants, academics and engineers, which are clearly middle class occupations.

But there is more to class than occupation. As Cole (1998) has said : "The concept of class is not descriptive, describing lifestyles, but is explanatory, identifying shared (abstract) class interests. If people experience the economic crisis as unemployment, or longer hospital waiting lists, or larger classes in schools for their children, or reduced pensions for retired people, or reduced development assistance, or reduced grants for students, or homelessness and starvation, these people have a shared class interest."

An example of these shared interests was revealed by the visit, earlier this year, by Indian community leader Stan Thekaekara, who swapped the thatched villages of southern India's tea producing Gudalur Valley for Matson, a post war brick and mortar housing state in Gloucester (Griffiths, 1999). He was in England as part of an unusual initiative run by Oxfam. Stan talked to residents on this disadvantaged estate. George Smith, who is 82, has lived on Matson for more than 40 years. He says that the biggest problem facing people is not the lack of money, but the feeling of not being accepted by society. Stan was able to tap into the shared interests of Matson residents - their shared feeling of not being accepted by society - and offer some solutions. One of his objectives is to establish trading links between Matson and Gudalur Valley, which is an interesting reversal of normal first and third world trading relationships.

Class is also about values, attitudes and behaviour. But the single greatest link between class and social exclusion is poverty. Class background has always been strongly associated with risk of poverty : "Despite the impact of the 1990's recession on some middle class areas of employment, poverty is basically a working class phenomenon" (LGMB, 1995) This does not mean that all working class people are poor ; but most poor people are working class. CPAG now estimate that one child in three in the UK lives below the poverty line and one commentator, David Byrne, has estimated that no less than 50% of the population are affected by unemployment and "labour instability" in some form from time to time (Byrne, 1997).

There is a similar overlap between poverty and social exclusion : not all socially excluded people are poor, and not all poor people are socially excluded, but most poor people are socially excluded and vice versa (Miller, 1998). Poverty is the most direct link between social exclusion and class : because most poor people are working class, and because most socially excluded people are poor. Exclusion is, however, not simply about material poverty (as shown by the Matson study), and because of this, some individuals and groups who are not necessarily poor may well suffer from other forms of discrimination and exclusion : for example black and ethnic minority communities ; women ; people with disabilities ; gay men and lesbians and so on.

Class and Public libraries

That social exclusion is not just about poverty has been recognised by government ministers, including Arts Minister Alan Howarth. His statement on public libraries and social exclusion is a good starting point for examining the issue of class and public libraries. Howarth (1998) said :

"The socially excluded are not just suffering from material poverty but are all too typically isolated from the social and civic networks that enable people to live successfully in - and contribute to - modern society. We are determined to ensure that our society does not become divided into information haves and

have-nots. Those who are socially disadvantaged, those with disabilities and those who otherwise cannot participate in education and training in the normal way must not be excluded from the information revolution that is upon us...Public libraries must more and more take their place as street corner universities, providing real opportunities for everyone regardless of their place in society"

This seems to suggest that everyone has a "place in society" and it is my view that this place is largely determined by the class system. As Muddiman (1999) has said : "The key determinants of social exclusion, most studies show, are structural : that is, most excluded people are poor, and they are working class". The key determinants of public library use and non use are also poverty and class. The "Breadline Britain" surveys reported by Bramley (1996) looked at the use of and attitudes to a range of public services by poor and disadvantaged people. Through use of multivariate analysis, these surveys identified social class as the most important single determinant of public library use, respondents in Bramley's highest social class grouping being 1.4 times as likely to use libraries compared with those in the lowest.

Bramley's findings have been echoed by a number of other studies. The major ASLIB (1995) study of public libraries found "substantial numbers of users" in each social class "although there is a higher proportion in the A,B,C1 (middle class) categories". The issue, then, is not how many middle and working class people use or do not use public libraries, but the percentage of these users and non users in proportion to the population as a whole :

* the upper middle class and middle class make up 15% of the population, but 41% of this class are frequent library users and 29% are non users

* the lower middle class make up 24% of the population, but 30% of this class are frequent library users and 40% are non users

* the skilled working class make up 30% of the population, but only 25% of this class are frequent users and 49% are non users

* the semi skilled and unskilled working class make up 31% of the population, but only 26% of this class are frequent users and 57% are non users

The Household Library Use Survey (1998) found that :

* the biggest users of public libraries are A,B,C1s (middle class)

* AB (middle class) households are more likely than other groups to be library ticket holders

* AB (middle class) people make wider and more extensive use of libraries than working class users who mainly visit libraries to borrow books

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* there are significant variations in the proportion of households borrowing categories of stock among social classes. ABC1 (middle class) people borrow more adult fiction and non fiction than C2DE (working class) people, for example.

Marcella and Baxter (1999) looked at the information needs of library users. When the social class of employed respondents to their survey was analysed, 76% were ABC1 (middle class) and only 24% were C2DE (working class)

We have a situation, therefore, where, in general terms, one third of the population is middle class and yet this class makes up two thirds of library users ; conversely, two thirds of the population are working class, but this class makes up only one third of library users. This disparity can be found in other related areas, such as education. For example, approximately two thirds of pupils at grammar schools are middle class and one third are working class ; the situation is reversed in comprehensive schools. The same ratio applies to sectors of further and higher education.

This is not a purely library and education phenomenon ; it also exists in many other areas. For example, a similar situation can be found with regard to participation in sport. In a survey by GHS (1998), 65% of professional (middle class) people participated in at least one sport over a 4 week period, compared to just 23% of unskilled (working class) people. This 40% difference offers a challenge to the sports industry, which is now trying to engage more working class people through leisure card schemes. This sector has recognised that there is a problem - based on class - and is doing something about it. The same cannot be said about the LIS sector, which has yet to recognise that there is a problem, and to accept that there a number of institutional barriers to public library usage.

Institutional barriers

As Muddiman (1999) has said "working class non users of public libraries...point to the institutional culture of the public library as a barrier to use...for many, public libraries continue to be associated with a white, middle class, academic culture which alienates many disadvantaged people". Durrani (1999) has made a similar point in relation to library services for Black and working class people : "In LIS it is the white, middle class that holds the stick which is used to marginalise Black and working class people and their information, education and cultural services. It is in this relation of power that Black librarians and communities have lost out. Until there is genuine equality in this power relationship, there will not be a relevant library service for Black people".The same could be said of working class people.

A starting point in building relevant library services for working class people is to ask them what they want. There has been very little research into the library needs of working class people. Most public library research, including the Public Library Users Survey (PLUS) focusses on library users, who tend

to be predominantly middle class. However, the work which has been carried out with working class communities is very revealing.

ASLIB (1995) found that "non users predominantly suspect that public library users are mainly middle class and that the library has an unchanging image". Cultural barriers associated with the institution are particularly powerful for age groups like teenagers. Linley and Usherwood (1998) report the following comments from a young person in a detached youth project : "Its a bit scary really...it always seems to be quiet and you feel terrible if you make a noise. There are lots of rules and regulations and quite honestly it turns me off."

In focus groups commissioned by York City Council (MCG, 1996) non users particularly associate such barriers with problems with library staff. Informants report that "staff are welcoming to people they know really well, but I could walk in and was completely ignored" and that staff were "unsympathetic to children and a bit dismissive if it's not a very high class subject". In similar groups commissioned by the London Borough of Merton (MVA, 1998) some working class non users highlight the still powerful association of the library with books, silence and reading as a source of alienation : "it's the word aint it, like library - its known as being a place where people just sit reading books doing nothing. Its the word aint it"

As the Merton report itself suggests, the very word "library" thus acts as a deterrent to many non users and as a symbol of a traditional, middle class alien culture. Other informants, however, immediately see through the tactic of a change of name : "I think your flogging a dead horse here, because people in this room dont really use a library and I dont think whatever you call it youre not gonna get us through the door. Its because we dont read and the fact that we dont go really"

As Muddiman (1999) has commented, "for these non users the gap between their own culture and that of the library is unbridegeable". The challenge for LIS workers is to bridge that gap, and this is what I would like to consider in the final part of my paper.

Combatting exclusion

If public libraries are to successfully combat social exclusion, a number of obstacles need to be overcome :

1. a class based analysis of social exclusion is required so that library managers and staff are aware of the connections between social class and social exclusion. Failure to recognise this link will lead to inappropriate action being taken. Short term, externally funded projects will not solve the problem. New public library strategies, structures and cultures are needed which recognise and tackle the class based nature of social exclusion.

2. social class is a taboo subject and it is difficult to get people talking about it, without them rejecting the idea or getting very defensive about it. More discussion by the profession is needed - more meetings on the subject and more articles and letters in the professional press are required. The LIC funded research into Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion has started this process.

3. social class is not viewed as being relevent by many senior public library managers and staff. Class is seen as being "political" while the library profession must stay "neutral". This explains the craven attitude of many library managers during the Thatcher years when the thrust of her policies was to redirect wealth from the poor to the rich. The Tory agenda for libraries was adopted, along with a whole new language and approach to service delivery based on managerialism and income generation. While managers focussed on the 3 Es of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, the other 3 Es of equality, equity and exclusion were forgotten.

4. public library staff are part of the problem rather than the solution. With the exception of some notable individuals and authorities, the service is managed and operated by middle class people who share their middle class values with middle class library users : what Rachel van Riel (1999) calls the dominant borrower. This makes the system self perpetuating and has marginalised all previous attempts to tackle social exclusion, such as community librarianship. Public libraries have institutionalised classism, which is a reflection of a societal problem, in the same way that institutionalised racism has been exposed in the police force.

While these obstacles are large, they can be overcome. What is needed is a fundamental shift in attitudes, behaviour and values within the public library service. This will require cultural and organisational change which is notoriously difficult and takes time. The following recommendations are necessary steps in this process.

Recommendations

It is recommended that public library authorities :

1. produce and implement long-term strategies for tackling social exclusion. These strategies will involve : targeting priority need ; secure funding ; advocacy and innovation ; monitoring and evaluation

2. adopt the five I's of involvement when dealing with working class communities and the socially excluded : information (maximum public access to as much information as possible) ; independence (community access to independent specialist advice) ; initiative (community groups to develop their own agendas, pro-actively) ; influence (communities to influence decision making) ; implementation (communities to participate in implementation, monitoring and supervision)

3. support communities in developing their own policy analyses :

"Communities would then be better placed to play an active role in setting the agenda and pressing for the wider policy changes required, if partnerships are to meet social needs as defined from the bottom up, rather than responding to the requirements of market led agendas determined from the top down" (Mayo, 1997).

4. develop meaningful partnerships between libraries and working class / socially excluded communities. Partnerships should be based on common objectives, shared resources, openness about power and dedicated staff.

Partnerships should focus on : process as well as social exclusion ; sharing of power and policy ; diversity across sectors with a commitment to social exclusion ; non-tokenistic involvement of people experiencing exclusion ; speaking out against social injustice, together and separately.

"Partnership that is an open, honest, targeted, outcome related process can and does make a distinctive contribution to combatting poverty and social exclusion" (Thornton, 1996)

5. provide adequate continuing education and training, via :

* appropriate staff training and awareness programmes

* education and training in community development for local councillors, to see it as a positive challenge, rather than a potential threat

* relevant training opportunities for the socially excluded

6. recruit staff who reflect the socio economic profile of the local community

7. bring the process of budget allocation within the social exclusion strategy. In other words, mainstream social exclusion by putting this issue at the heart of the budget setting process.

8. include social class in equal opportunity, anti poverty, social exclusion and other policies.

9. review rules, procedures and charging policies to ensure that these do not create barriers to tackling social exclusion.

10. carry out or commission research into the use and non-use of libraries by social class. This research should include studies of societies and services that are more socially inclusive in other parts of the world.

In trying to implement these recommendations, public libraries will have a number of useful and powerful tools at their disposal :

* the four C's of Best Value can be used to carry out fundamental reviews of public library services, to make them more relevant to working class communities. Challenge all of your services to see what they are doing and what they can do for working class people. Compare your services with other library services and other Council services to see how they are dealing with these issues. Consult all sections of your community, including the working class. And look at what the "competition" is doing in your area via the private, voluntary and other public sectors. In particular, develop relevant performance indicators which can measure your progress on these issues.

* use the DCMS (1999) policy guidance, "Libraries for all : social inclusion in public libraries", as the basis for your strategy and to raise the issue with your staff and Members. The guidance contains a six point plan for tackling social exclusion and some good practice examples from library authorities around the country.

* the DCMS will be monitoring how these policy guidelines are being implemented by library authorities through Annual Library Plans. Use these Plans as a way of planning, implementing and monitoring services to working class people.

* the LIC is funding a major research project into Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion, which Dave Muddiman will be talking about later. This project has produced working papers on aspects of social exclusion, including class, which you can read to inform your thinking and action. You can also join the Action Planning Network which John Vincent will be introducing later.

* the LIC will also be producing a policy statement on social exclusion which you can use to raise the profile of this issue in your authority

* finally, there are a number of action plans in existence which you can easily adapt for working class communities : Ethnic Diversity, Public Libraries and Citizenship (Roach and Morrison, 1998) ; the Macpherson Report (1999) ; and Racial Equality Means Quality (CRE, 1995) all contain recommendations which can be applied equally to the Black and working class communities.

A combination of national policy and local action can lead to fundamental changes in the ways in which public libraries interact with their communities. Public libraries are already based in those communities ; our challenge is to make them community based.

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Libraries in the Soviet Union

"Information for Social Change" readers are probably aware of the pitiful state that libraries in the Soviet Union have sunk to. The once mighty Lenin library in Moscow can no longer afford the postage to return inter library loans to the British Library. But things were not always thus. A literature search of libraries in the Soviet Union from 1937 to 1991 revealed the development of a magnificent library system.

Lenin's Libraries

Lenin remarked that for him the state of the library service was an indication of the general level of culture. Lenin made sure that libraries stayed close to the masses and even during the Russian Civil War book stocks were not only maintained at their former level but actually increased. Library work in the young Soviet State was built on the instructions of Lenin who demanded that all libraries were to be made generally accessible.

Lenin, in an article "On the work of the People's Commissariat for Education", wrote : "We must strive continually to have newspapers and books distributed, by regulation and gratis, only to libraries and reading - rooms, with a network of them covering the whole country, reaching the whole mass of the people, the workers, soldiers and peasants...Then the work of education can go ahead with seven-league strides."

Immediately after the October Revolution, Lenin wrote in a memorandum to the Petrograd Public Library that it must "immediately start exchanging books with all public and state libraries in the capital and in the provinces and also with libraries abroad (in Finland, Sweden, and so on)."

Stalin's Libraries

Cashmore (1937) noted that "Russian libraries, which were very few before the Revolution, now number (large and small) about 50,000. Apparently every school, park, institution, university, trade union, club, factory, government and railway has its own library". The largest Russian libraries (state, university and society) were among the greatest in the world. There was probably far more reading (in proportion to the population) in Russia than in any other country. There was an all-embracing system for interlibrary loans and books were published in 120 languages. Periodicals (some with enormous circulations) were very numerous (12,368 in 110 languages in 1935). Many libraries were open till 11pm and everybody in Russia had "work, salary, paid holidays and pension." Library workers were trained at 48 technical high schools and three library colleges. All training was free and salaries were paid during all periods of training, work and holidays.

Trease (1937) visited "one of the finest children's libraries in the world" - the Central Children's Library of Kharkov. The library was equipped as a centre for youth activities of every kind and stocked 50,000 volumes in Ukrainian, Russian and 58 other languages. The atmosphere was that of a huge juvenile club and a novel feature of the library was a restaurant where, for a rouble or two, children could get anything from a glass of mineral waters to a square meal. The most striking characteristic of this library was "its vital contact with everyday life, and the ease with which reading can be supplemented by doing...so that almost any interest stirred by books, whether scientific, artistic, or practical, can be developed under expert guidance and with first class facilities".

Karklin (1944) described the V.I.Lenin State Public Library as "the national book depository of the Soviet Union". It held 9,600,000 volumes and continued to provide a service even in the days of October - November 1941, when Moscow was threatened by Nazi invasion. At the end of their working day many staff from the library made their way to military hospitals where they delivered lectures, gave talks and read to the wounded. During the Patriotic War - as Russians call World War 2 - the Lenin library was used as a homework centre by children and continued to serve not only its own readers but also the libraries of many other cities in the Soviet Union : "Qualified bibliographers are on duty day and night so that, when necessary, books can be issued at night".

Firth (1953) described the county library system in the USSR. This operated via postal loans, book boxes, book carriers and vehicular libraries. Postal loans were sent to readers in extremely isolated areas while book boxes contained fifty to two thousand books and were distributed to rural areas in the USSR by rail, water, air and road. Boxes of books could be requested by any group of people who had no access to library facilities - reading room committees, village Soviets, collective farms, factories and construction sites. No charge was made for this service. Book carriers were volunteer librarians who took books to the homes of those who could not visit the library themselves. Vehicular libraries looked like single-decker buses and were shelved to carry anything up to two thousand books. They were equipped with radios and folding chairs and tables which were set up in fields and yards so that readers could look at newspapers and periodicals. The mobile library staff spent 22 out of every 30 days on the road. The routes were planned in consultation with the local education and cultural committees and the Soviets (local councils) and each place was visited twice per month. During the visit of the travelling library to a village, lectures and films were given and all these schemes of book distribution to scattered and isolated populations were entirely free.

Cold War libraries

Dudley (1959) found that "a lack of sympathy with the aims and practices of the Soviet state has led to a disinclination on the part of many British librarians to be interested in Soviet librarianship". He noted that library services in the USSR were "comparable in magnitude and variety with those of the USA and our own country".

The virtual abolition of illiteracy and the achievements of Soviet science and technology would have been impossible without organised library services penetrating every aspect of Soviet life. Extensive library services were provided by trade unions, factories, state and collective farms. Professional education at lower and higher levels was "more thorough than in many countries".

When Pottinger (1960) went to the USSR it took him "a few days to get used to the concept of the complete public ownership of every means of production and distribution." The Soviet government attached great importance to libraries and education for librarianship was highly organised. The status of Russian librarians was high and they were relatively affluent. The Lenin library had 2,200 staff, 22 reading rooms and seats for 2,500 readers. The generous provision of reading or study rooms was a common feature of Russian libraries.

The librarian at the Moscow Central Library told Pottinger that "each year the budget increases and, she assured us, the library budget cannot be reduced". Most years the library received a windfall from the local factories and other enterprises in the City, who all operated according to a Seven Year Plan. To make sure that the library plan was being delivered there were Library Inspectors "to see that the various libraries kept up to scratch, and were the subject of regular reports". Wherever groups of people were likely to congregate, the Russian libraries deposited collections of books : "Thus, books from the Mass (public) Libraries may be borrowed from factories, or from shops, or from a deposit in a block of flats, or even from barber shops !". Book displays were a prominent feature of the Soviet libraries, much more so than in the UK.

Pottinger visited a library service operated by the Machine-building Trade Union in the Likhachev Automobile Factory, a massive plant with 40,000 workers. The library was housed in a "Palace of Culture" and there were 23 branch libraries in various parts of the factory. The total book stock was 400,000, with a library staff of 39. The Annual Budget of the library was fixed at each Annual conference of the Factory Branch of the Trade Union, "and the Librarian assured us she always got all the money she asked for". Every Wednesday there was a literary lecture, with an average attendance of 200 - 300. The Main Reading Room had seats for 300, "and we were struck to find every seat occupied at 10.30 in the morning, mainly by young people."

Pottinger was amazed that the Lenin library "organised regular short courses in the use of bibliographies for readers ". The number of library staff to students at Moscow University Library (430 staff to 22,000 students) was many times higher than the proportions to be found in British universities and colleges.

Blum (1962) noted that "the Russian effort in publishing books, and reference books especially, was also second to none".

Firsov (1962) pointed out that "in pre-revolutionary Russia, with the exception of a few short courses, there was no training of librarians. It was only after the October Socialist Revolution that it became possible to train qualified librarians." Students who took correspondence and evening courses were granted extra leave with pay during their period of study. There were no fees for students and at the end of their studies they all got jobs. The curriculum provided for 46 weeks of training in a variety of city, provincial, regional and rural libraries.

Morozovz (1962) stated that : "The Communist Party and the Soviet Government always paid great attention to questions of the development of library work in the USSR." Following Lenin's directions that access to all libraries should be widely based, the Council of Ministers of the USSR decreed that Scientific and Technical Libraries should be open to the public, giving the general reader access to the wealth of material in them.

Poluboyarinov (1964) believed that "books are the most powerful weapon in the armoury of culture and education. Their importance is especially great for contemporary man building a Communist Society, in enriching his store of knowledge and promoting special skills, and for his general cultural development. This indicates the great part to be played by libraries, circulating books to all levels of the population". The number of libraries of all kinds rose to 381,000 at the beginning of 1961. These libraries stocked 1,900 million volumes which is 41 times greater than the number of books in all libraries in Tsarist Russia. In every republic of the Soviet Union there were to every worker more than 10 books - in fact anywhere between 10 and 22.

Poluboyarinov found that "the educational standard of library workers has risen greatly in recent years". He mentioned the 13,000 "librarian-welfare workers", who worked on activities concerned with social welfare in libraries : "It is clear that the number of people employed on welfare work in libraries must be increased, and library committees must be made more active and widen their circle of readers".

Simsova (1965) pointed out that "Soviet librarianship had a highly developed system of techniques for guiding the reader". The ratio of staff to readers was high and staff were "expected to read newspapers, periodicals, book reviews and to examine new books as they come in".

Readers were encouraged to write reviews which were published in library bulletins, displayed on notice boards, pasted into scrapbooks, broadcast by local radio stations and forwarded to publishers and authors. "Advanced readers" were "informed by post of new additions in their field and invited to recommend new books for addition to stock".

Taylor (1966) found that "Russian books are amongst the cheapest in Europe". There were no women's magazines because "women were not regarded as being different from men and so did not have any special problems or interests". In all walks of life, including libraries, "executive positions were frequently held by relatively young people". Librarians had no professional association of their own but were members of the Cultural Workers Trade Union. Taylor discovered that the Lenin library's book fund was "calculated to be sufficient to purchase a fourth of the world's production". She noted that "reader criticism is encouraged ; the last page of every book contains the publishers' address together with a request that the reader communicate his opinion of the work. Also reader conferences are often held at the editorial offices ; last year (1965) 6,500 people took part in these. Similar conferences are sometimes arranged for whole villages and other communities all over the USSR."

Simsova (1966) stated that "Since the setting up of the Communist state in Russia there has been a terrific drive towards education. Libraries have grown up everywhere that people gather, in factories and work places, schools, colleges and universities, and even in places of recreation such as the Park of Rest and Culture in Moscow". The Russian national library was open till midnight and free for all to use which "made the British Museum's regulations appear very antique". The provision of books and periodicals on collective farms put the UK to shame.

Simsova asked a UK library audience : "How many libraries in this country actually hold book discussion groups and literary circles. How many actually invite authors to speak about the work they are currently doing and let the people criticise and advise".

Jones (1966) noticed that "Russians seemed to be enthusiastic readers. Wherever we went in the centres of Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, book and magazine stalls and kiosks seemed to abound - even in the Metro stations - and were obviously doing a brisk trade." In addition, he heard of volunteers visiting non-library users and of book selection committees formed jointly of staff and readers.

MacCutcheon (1966) described a Soviet " educational system which to me seemed Utopian" while Arnold (1966) saw people reading on the street and park benches in such numbers that he concluded that "the new generation literacy had truly arrived". He found that reading was indisputably important in schools and the librarians he met frequently told him "that they have all the money and staff they need".

De Mauny (1973) made a similar point : "As for books, the proud boast is that the Soviet publishing houses pour out roughly five million books a day or getting on for two thousand million books a year. There are also thousands of libraries since no self respecting factory, state or collective farm can afford to be without one, with a total membership of one hundred and eight million ; in other words, not only do they buy books in vast quantities but three out of four Soviet citizens are also regular borrowers of books."

Biggs (1984) visited the Lenin library and said that "the scale of its operations matches that of the Library of Congress". In Russia the librarian had a primary responsibility for educating people and guiding the users' reading. The word propaganda was used frequently, in its original sense of to propagate or disseminate.

To help accommodate the growing leisure time of the Soviet workers, self service libraries (without staff) were developed. Russia sent books to all developing countries and not only in Russian, but in all languages, including Arabic. Biggs found that there was "no unemployment, on the contrary, a shortage of labour".

Glasnost libraries

Wilkins (1991) reported that glasnost had changed all of this. The Moscow Library Association was "trying to set up an employment exchange for librarians made redundant by some Soviet ministries "

In 1998 the status and pay of librarians in the Soviet Union has fallen to an all time low. There is mass unemployment amongst library workers and those who do have jobs are not paid for months at a time. This is in sharp contrast to Soviet libraries under Communist rule.

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"Friends" versus supporters of Cuban libraries

On 15 June 1999 an organisation calling itself the "Friends of Cuban Libraries" issued a press release on the Internet alleging that "independent librarians" were being arrested in Cuba and their "libraries" were being confiscated. The "Friends" claim to be an "independent, nonpartisan, non-profit organisation which supports intellectual freedom and Cuba's independent library movement". The founders of the organisation are Jorge Sanguinetty and Robert Kent.

Jorge Sanguinetty resides in Miami. He was head of Cuba's Department of National Investment Planning before he left the country in 1967. He is also a newspaper columnist and a commentator on Radio Marti, a US government funded radio station which broadcasts anti-Cuban programmes. This station illegally invades Cuban air space and adds insult to injury by using the name of the Cuban national hero.

Robert Kent is a librarian who lives in New York City. On four occasions he has taken books and pamphlets to Cuba for Freedom House and the Centre for a Free Cuba, both of which are funded by the US Agency for International Development. On three occasions his travel expenses were paid by Freedom House or the Centre for a Free Cuba.

Freedom House is an anti-Castro organisation which has received $500,000 (from USAID and the US Information Agency) in US government funding. The Centre for a Free Cuba has received $400,000. These grants form part of the $3.1m in payment to organisations that are committed to the overthrow of the Cuban government. The funding springs from Track 2 of the Torricelli Act. Track 1 is dedicated to tightening the illegal 40 year US blockade of Cuba ; Track 2 provides for US government support to non-governmental organisations in Cuba, including "dissidents" and "independent librarians". But, as Ann Sparanese, a New Jersey public librarian, points out :

"Not one of these so-called libraries is a library, and not one of the allegedly repressed librarians is, or ever was, a professional librarian. They are professional dissidents. There are many US visitors to Cuba who travel there mainly for the purposes of searching for "dissidents" and Mr Kent, who describes himself as "no friend" of the Cuban government is among these."

In his determination to champion the political freedoms of "dissidents" in Cuba, Mr Kent does not concern himself with the fact that other US citizens, unless they receive a "licence" from the US government are prohibited from travelling and spending money in Cuba at risk of jail or fines. For every "independent librarian" who has been harassed and arrested in Cuba, hundreds of US citizens (on trips NOT approved by the US government as was Mr Kent's) returning from Cuba have been harassed at customs ; had their belongings, Cuban materials and passports confiscated ; have been

threatened with fines and jail terms ; have had the FBI hound them at home and work. They have also been the subjects of Senate hearings and had their names and addresses published in the hearing reports.

These violations of the rights of US citizens do not concern Mr Kent who could travel to Cuba without such threats over his head. Clearly he was doing the work of the US government in Cuba and financed by them. His freedom of travel and expression are guaranteed even promoted. What books did he take into Cuba and which "dissident" groups did he help to fund ? If a foreigner or foreign government did that in the US, this would be illegal. Imagine if the activities of the Cuba Solidarity movement in the US were bankrolled by the Cuban government. It would not only be scandalous, but unless those people had declared themselves to be the "agents of a foreign power" they would go to jail. But the US Interests Section in Havana regularly funnels money to "dissident" groups in Cuba. The kind of thing that used to be done covertly by the CIA is now being done openly by the type of groups that Mr Kent represents.

Mr Kent is also silent on the countless attempts by his government to overthrow the Castro regime. These include assassination attempts on Cuban leaders, invasions, the introduction of biological warfare, the destruction of factories, the financing of terrorism and the use of the Guantanamo base to initiate provocations. This state sponsored terror has gone on for over 40 years and has led to the death and injury of over 5500 Cuban civilians.

Cubanet

The "Friends" get most of their information from Cubanet, the main promoter of the "Independent Libraries Project in Cuba". Cubanet is based in Coral Gables, Florida, and financed by the following : National Endowment for Democracy, which supports a number of anti-Cuban government enterprises emanating from such places as the National Republican Institute, Ronald Reagan's creation ; the Open Society, funded by George Soros ; USAID, dedicated to advancing the "political and economic interests of the United States" ; private donors, including members of the Cuban American National Foundation, a violently anti Castro organisation.

The "Friends of Cuban Libraries" do not appear to have many supporters. Ralph Papakhian, a music librarian at Indiana University, commented, "Unfortunately for Kent, the USAID and the CIA have already established well known terrorist track records as regards their activities in Cuba". Joe Grant, another US librarian, makes a similar point : "If they are getting money from the US Agency for International Development, I question their objectivity and their ability to state that they are independent and non partisan".

Mark Rosenzweig, editor of the "Progressive Librarian", was even more explicit : "Mr Kent and his colleagues have shown no interest in working to lift the blockade which has crippled the material basis for cultural development in

Cuba, effecting its libraries as well as many other more fundamental sectors of Cuban society. He has never contacted the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association about our efforts to help lift the blockade, nor has he been interested in our programming which has involved Cuban librarians".

Mr Kent says that his organisation takes no position on the US blockade against Cuba. This is surprising given that the "Friends" are supposed to support human rights and the UN has defined the provision of information as a human right. The blockade also applies to food and medicine, another violation of human rights which Kent ignores. The "Friends" claim to be neutral on the blockade yet Jorge Sanguinetty is a very prominent spokesman in favour of the blockade, as any search of the WWW with his name will show. A recent speech of his at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies was avidly against the lifting of the blockade.

Ann Sparanese sees the "Friends" group as an opportunity rather than a threat : "Perhaps we should thank the so-called "Friends of Cuban Libraries" for reminding us to strengthen our opposition to the blockade and to do more to assist the Cuban people to get rid of it, once and for all".

Cuban Libraries Support Group

On 1 July 1999 the Cuban Libraries Support Group (CLSG) was established. The objectives of the CLSG are to support : Cuban libraries, librarians, library and information workers and the Cuban Library Association (ASCUBI) ; Cuba's free and comprehensive education system and high literacy levels ; and the Cuban people's right to self determination and to chose the social, political and economic systems which support their library service.

The CLSG will work in partnership with four organisations : Information for Social Change, a progressive librarian's network ; the Library Association, which passed a motion in favour of Cuban libraries at its AGM ; Book Aid International, which sends books to Cuban libraries ; and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign.

Joe Grant welcomed the CLSG : "Cuba's libraries and librarians are dear to members of this family and we try to provide support in a number of ways. We really want more information". Mark Rosenzweig also offered his support : "I have no problem with the outline and goals of the Cuban Library Support Group and will be glad to promote it among the Progressive Librarians Guild. I will publish the statement in the next possible issue of Progressive Librarian".

Mark went on to make another very important point : "You must remember, that we in the US bear a special responsibility for the situation of the Cuban people, that we are the "Great Power" in the hemisphere, that our country is consciously trying to strangle Cuba economically, and that it is incumbent upon our activists here, therefore, to be especially concerned".

Mark is proposing to members of the Progressive Librarians Guild that PLG becomes an official endorser of the CSLG. He is presently polling "the interested members and the response is very positive". Also, at the next American Library Association (ALA) conference a resolution on the CSLG will be put before the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) asking them to formally endorse it. A resolution on Cuba, including support for CSLG, will also be taken to the ALA Council.

Ann Sparanese agrees "that SRRT should take an official position on this and support and participate in the program outlined by the Cuban Libraries Support Group".

The debate between the "Friends" and supporters of Cuban libraries continues on the Internet. The balance of contributions are overwhelmingly in favour of the CLSG. Here is a flavour of what people are saying. Elaine Harger thinks that "Robert Kent's group bears all the hallmarks of being one cog in the US machine of US "public diplomacy" that works quite successfully to undermine attempts of people to establish within their own countries alternatives to the inequalities and injustices on which capitalism depends and thrives".

"Keep in mind that the maintenance of those inequalities and injustices requires its own brand of censorship, and the US has a rich history of imprisoning, deporting, blacklisting and killing the advocates of civil rights, labour rights and human rights. The Robert Kents of the US do not necessarily have a commitment to freedom, equality and peace. Many Robert Kents come from a tradition of bashing skulls of striking workers, stealing land from native inhabitants, exploiting the natural resources of foreign countries, and smashing the presses of abolitionists,anarchists and other opponents of unjust status quos".

For more information about the Cuban Libraries Support Group contact john.pateman@merton.gov.uk.

Reviews

Progressive Librarianship in the US: Reviews of *Progressive librarian: a journal for critical studies & progressive policies in librarianship* and *MSRRT newsletter*

Despite similar economic and political conditions to those in the UK, progressive librarianship is still alive and kicking in the US! Partly this is because of the focus given to such issues by the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association (ALA) - although even they have difficulties with the ALA itself (see below) - and its spin-offs, such as the Minnesota Library Association Social Responsibility Round Table (MSRRT), and partly because there are library workers who want to raise and examine important issues and take risks, hence the Progressive Librarians Guild.

Here in the UK, we have this journal, and the occasional progressive article in *Impact*, but, otherwise, the radicalism of the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s seems to have withered away: no more Librarians for Social Change or Women in Libraries (even the Association of Assistant Librarians, admittedly not a very catchy title for a group, has become the Career Development Group), and the emphasis has moved to "performing" and measuring, sponsorship and partnerships as libraries try to become more like big business.

These two issues of US journals therefore come as a breath of fresh air!

Progressive librarian is the journal of the Progressive Librarians Guild which has been established to:

- provide a forum for the open exchange of radical views on library issues

- conduct campaigns to support progressive and democratic library activities locally, nationally and internationally

- defend activist librarians as they work to effect changes in their own libraries and communities

- bridge the artificial and destructive gap within our profession between school, public, academic and special libraries

- encourage debate about prevailing management strategies adopted directly from the business world, and propose democratic forms of library administration

- consider the impact of technological change in the library workplace and on the provision of library service

- monitor the professional ethics of librarianship from a social responsibility perspective

- facilitate contacts between progressive librarians and other professional and scholarly groups dealing with communications world-wide.

Two issues per year of the journal have been produced since the preview edition in Summer 1990, and have regular features on libraries and librarianship in Africa (including pieces on the ANC), feminism, technology, lesbian and gay issues for libraries - we have issue 14, Spring 1998 for review.

This issue contains a powerful editorial, criticising the ALA for "institutionalizing silence" by the way that they deal with the issue of statements of a political nature (such as the open letter, "Librarians Against War", pp47-50) and side-line "controversial" issues (such the *Resolution on Israeli censorship*), as well as highlighting the debate that arose over the ALA's decision to promote a joint ALA-McDonald's reading campaign, and the current "hot topic" of the ALA's relationship with the Boy Scouts of America, despite the latter's discriminatory policies prohibiting atheists, agnostics and homosexuals from membership.

The articles in issue 14 are:

"Garlic, vodka, and the politics of gender: anti-intellectualism in American librarianship" by Michael Winter (pp5-12), a quick look at some important issues, including librarianship's romance with ICT;

"Competing visions of library service" by France Bouthillier (pp13-21) a brief presentation of some of the findings of a study in Quebec, which, although rather ponderous, is actually an important piece, drawing attention to the "basic dilemma in public librarianship: the tension between educating and responding to patrons' requests" (p19);

"Growing our communications future: access - not just wires" by Karen Coyle (pp22-33) which gives a good indication of its contents in the superb opening paragraph:

"I have to admit that I'm really sick and tired of the Information Highway. I feel like I've already heard so much about it that it must be come and gone already, yet there is no sign of it. This is truly a piece of federal vaporware."

"The 'Invisibles': lesbian women as library users" by Heike Seidel (pp34-40), a summary of the key points which were discussed at the Women's Summer University in Munich, July 1994, and the 10th Berlin Lesbian Week, October 1994; this article is followed by a "'Lesbians

and Libraries' resource list" which gives details of some bookshops world-wide (pp41-43);

"Outsourcing federal libraries" by R Lee Hadden (pp45-46), a very quick look at this important topic;

and two "Added Entries" for the Archive "Memorial", St Petersburg, Russia and the St Petersburg Centre for Gender Issues.

I felt that some of the articles were almost too short to be of real value (especially that on outsourcing), but that, overall, this is an important librarianship journal, and deserves to be much more widely available.

Further details from Progressive Librarians Guild, P.O. Box 2203, Times Square Station, New York NY 10108,
or visit their Website <http://home.earthlink.net/~rlitwin/proglib.html>

As it name indicates, **MSRRT newsletter** is the "alternative news, views and resource listings" of the Minnesota Library Association Social Responsibilities Round Table. It is produced six times a year (free to MSRRT members, and by donation to everyone else), and we have volume 11 no.3, May/June 1998 for review.

It includes news items about MSRRT members (perhaps most famously Sanford Berman) and libraries; details of new Websites of interest (eg Arab Film Distribution; Native American Rights Fund); and, for the major part of the Newsletter, reviews of films, videos, books and magazines, together with listings of "Changes" (of address, name of organisation, etc) and catalogues and items received. Examples of the 35 or so titles reviewed in this issue are: Susan Eisenberg *We'll call you if we need you: experiences of women working construction* (ILR Press, 1998); Ron Sakolsky and Stephen Dunifer (eds) *Seizing the airwaves: a free radio handbook* (AK Press, 1998); Steve Stewart (comp) *Full-frontal: male nudity video guide* (Companion Press, 1998) - "Leonardo DiCaprio and Antonio Banderas buffs may consult it fruitfully"!; *You're not alone: conversations with breast cancer survivors and those who love them* (Voice Arts, 1997 [audio cassettes]); *Anti-airport alert*, a zine about the fight against a third Chicago-area airport.

As can be seen from the sampler above, the range of material reviewed is immense, and the Newsletter is doing a very important job in bringing these to wider attention.

Where are the UK's regional/national versions of this?

Further details from: MSRRT Newsletter, 4645 Columbus Avenue S., Minneapolis, MN 55407,
or visit their Website: <http://www.cs.unca.edu/~davidson/msrrt>

Reviews of bETWEEN the LINES and The Spark

bETWEEN the LINES is, as their blurb describes, "the magazine for cynical optimism ... Informative, Unorthodox, Inspiring Open and funny ..." We have three issues to review: they are not dated, but one is stamped inside with a date in November 1995 (issue no.7), one is post the last General Election (issue no.12), and the third has an advert for a benefit event in March 1999 and so was presumably produced in early 1999 (and is also presumably issue no.13!)

They have a slightly dated, rather naughty quality, with, in my view, some rather thin attempts at being funny (the Tommy Baldwin bits), yet, at the same time, include some important and interesting articles.

Issue 7, for example, includes a piece by someone remembering routing the BNP in Brick Lane in 1993; an article on "Getting organised" to build to change the world ("sects are no solution"); a surreal piece, "Zen Stalinism - our only hope" by Attila the Stockbroker; an interview with Reclaim the Streets, the people behind protests for car-free space; a critique of Labour Party policies; a very brief article about English traitors in WWII; a very good, but too brief piece on "Football - the people's game", highlighting some of the current problems (corruption, drugs, money ...); and the back page has some short news items.

Issue 12 has a very useful two-page critique of the Countryside March; an interesting piece on "Spooks in the news" (I'd missed that Sandy Gall was a "spook"); a one-page article, "Diana is she really dead!"; a good brief article on "A socialist strategy" which outlines socialist priorities; an interview with the Green Party; "Yet another crap Spice Girls article" which is a biting attack on their appropriation of the idea of "Girl Power"; an article on public ownership; a page of reviews (of, for example, Socialist news, the newspaper of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party; Smash hits from X Class War); a letters page; and, again, short news items on the back page.

Issue 13 includes a good lead article on consumerism; a rallying call to get involved, "A time for thought, a time for action" (with a list of useful contacts); an interview with Ken Coates MEP; an excellent brief call to action (rather than "closet party builders and egotists"), "Question everything, do something"; an interview with Alexei Sayle (where he is splenetic about Tony Benn); a fascinating piece on the group, Collectivities, who operate in Faridabad, India, and who "are engaged in the profound and experimental re-examination that the Left needs"; an article on global economic meltdown; a page on music and politics; and the usual news items at the back.

Further details from bETWEEN the LINES, Box 32, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.

The Spark, the Workers Party of New Zealand Monthly Journal, is towards the other end of the scale, carrying a number of serious an in-depth articles. We have the November 1998 issue to review, and this includes pieces on pension cuts; health cuts; "Rents and overcrowding rising"; Pinochet; Kerry Packer; the NZ defence force; unemployment; economics; immigration; "The Britomart Scheme - a means of enriching big business"; Indonesia; Kosovo; "November 7, 1917 - the day the world was transformed"; and, on the back page, some "Snippets" (I like the one about the new Japanese-made toilet which has a remote control that opens the lid before you get to the toilet, massages your bottom, kills the nasty smells and germs, and heats the room!)

This is an important voice for New Zealand and valuably highlights many world-wide issues.

Further details from: Boxholder, Box 10282, Dominion Road, Auckland, New Zealand,
or visit their Website: <http://home.clear.net.nzpages/wpnz>

Information for Social Change

Information for Social Change is an activist organisation that examines issues of censorship, freedom and ethics amongst library and information workers. It is committed to promoting alternatives to the dominant paradigms of library and information work and publishes its own journal "Information for Social Change".

The ways by which information is controlled and mediated has a serious influence on the ways people think, how they communicate, what they believe is "the real world", what the limits of permissable are. This applies equally to information that comes through the channels of the mass media, through our bookshops or through our libraries.

Of course, free and equal access to information is a myth throughout the world, although different situations pertain in different countries. Control is more explicit and cruder in some places, more "sophisticated" and more invisible elsewhere (for example in Britain). One of the aims of Information for Social Change is to document those situations.

But we want to go further than that, documenting also the alternatives to this control, the radical and progressive channels by which truly unfettered, unmediated ideas may circulate. And further still : to encourage information workers to come together, to share ideas, to foster these alternatives - whether we are publishers, librarians, booksellers, communications workers or distributors. Whoever you are, if you are in sympathy with us, join us.

Statement of Aims

To address issues of freedom of information and censorship as they affect library and information work

To promote alternatives to mainstream library and information provision

To provide a forum for the exchange of radical views on library and information issues

To debate ethics and freedom with the library and information professions

To challenge the dominant paradigms of library and information work

To network with and support other progressive library and information organisations

Information for Social Change is an Organisation in Liaison with the Library Association

Activities

As well as publishing "Information for Social Change" twice a year, we also organise seminars and conferences with other progressive organisations such as LINK - a Network for North South Library Development. Conference themes have included :

* Better Read than Dead : libraries in China, Cuba, People's Korea and Vietnam

* People Without Places : the information needs of refugees and asylum seekers

* Libraries and Social and Political Exclusion : an international perspective

The proceedings of these conferences were subsequently published and are available from the editorial address.

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I / my organisation would like to subscribe to Information for Social Change

Name :

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Individuals = £5pa ; organisations = £15pa

Please send cheques, made payable to "J.Pateman" to 32 Petten Grove, Orpington, Kent, BR5 4PU

Getting involved

Do you want to contribute to Information for Social Change ? Please indicate your areas of interest :

* writing articles for the journal

* reviewing publications

* supplying news items

* networking

* join the editorial board

* organise conferences and events